

# Governor Markell Establishes Youth Re-Entry Education Task Force

*Executive Order 45 requires review of opportunities available to youth coming out of the juvenile justice system*

**Wilmington** – Joined by state juvenile justice and education leaders at the [Delaware Children's Department's](#) newly completed educational facility on Faulkland Road, Governor Jack Markell today established the Youth Re-Entry Education Task Force. Created by today's signing of Executive Order 45, the Task Force will develop recommendations for ensuring the appropriate services are available for youth when they return to their communities from juvenile secure care facilities.

"Many juveniles placed in secure facilities thrive in an environment where they are offered structure, especially in their educational experience," said Governor Markell. "The work of this Task Force will help to ensure their positive momentum continues, giving them the best opportunity to stay on the right path, while reducing their risk of re-offending when they return to their communities. We all benefit when they can contribute to their full potential."

The Governor named Secretary Jennifer Ranji of the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families (DSCYF) to lead the Task Force. Out of 184 juveniles in the custody of her Department's Division of Youth Rehabilitative Services (YRS) last year, only 11 returned to a traditional school setting. Two joined Job Corps while 93 withdrew or failed to return to school and 42 landed in alternative placements. The remaining 36 are either back in state care, in out of state placements, deceased, or in the adult correctional system. Secretary Ranji said returning to their home school is not

always possible for these youth because of the nature of their charges.

“I believe we can and we must come up with additional and innovative solutions to help these youth, who are some of our most at risk students,” said Secretary Ranji. “I’m excited to work with the members of this Task Force, which brings together leaders from the many organizations and communities with a vested interest in seeing these youth succeed.”

Other Task Force members include representatives from the Departments of Education, Health and Social Services, Safety and Homeland Security, Corrections and Justice. Representatives from the House and Senate, the Director of YRS, citizens, the Chief Judge of Delaware’s Family Court, and representatives from educational, non-profit and faith based organizations will also participate.

The Task Force will examine the quality and availability of educational programs – including special education, alternative school programs, and career and technical training opportunities – for juveniles returning from secure care settings. Members will also:

- Review access to post-secondary education;
- Examine ways to improve collaboration and information-sharing among stakeholders;
- Evaluate correctional and re-entry education improvement plans for juveniles re-entering the community;
- Develop a data collection system; and
- Make policy recommendations

Recommendations will be due to the Governor and the General Assembly by December 31, 2014.

As an indication of the academic success of students in state custody, Ferris School Principal Rod Sutton announced results from spring 2014 state assessments. At Ferris, 68% of the boys who tested increased their reading scores and 71% increased

their math scores from the fall testing. Overall, among the 107 students at the Department's six sites that receive educational services, 79% of students realized gains compared to the fall. Among those students, the average gain in reading was 72 points and the average gain in Math was 73 points.

"The Task Force has a critically important charge," said Sutton. "It is imperative that we as a community of concerned adults wrap around our young people the intentional supports to help them when they leave our care. Without this support, the outcomes for these young people far too often are tragic."

Eduardo Griffith, a student at the Department's Level IV facility Mowlds Cottage joined Sutton at the signing of the Executive Order. Expelled from school at 16, he entered Ferris at age 17 at a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education level. He said he had given up hope for a future because he didn't have a degree and was so far behind in classes. He said it was only because teachers at Ferris took the time and effort to work with him, one on one, that he was able to catch up and earn his GED. Eduardo has also been given the name of a life coach and others who he can connect with once he leaves DSCYF care if he encounters obstacles.

"Other kids who are in the system like me need the opportunity to finish their education even though they may have made bad choices in the past," Griffith. "I hope this group can find a way to make that happen because if they don't, then kids will probably end up in trouble again. If it weren't for Ferris I would have given up, but now I'm looking forward to college."

[Photos from the signing](#)

[Video from the signing](#)